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1922

**A LETTER
TO THE
UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS
MEMORIAL CORPORATION**

**FROM
KATE STEPHENS**



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"Above all things truth
beareth away the victory."

A LETTER TO
THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS
MEMORIAL CORPORATION

For the
Library of Congress
from
Kate Stephens



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“O ye men, it is not the great king, nor the multitude of men . . . that excelleth.

Who is it then that ruleth them, or hath the lordship over them? . . .

Great is the truth, and stronger than all things.

All the earth calleth upon the truth, and the heaven blesseth it. All works shake and tremble at it, and with it is no unrighteous thing. . . . It endureth, and is always strong. It liveth and conquereth for evermore.

With her there is no accepting of persons or rewards; but she doeth the things that are just, and refraineth from all unjust and wicked things; and all men do well like of her work. . . . She is the strength, kingdom, power and majesty of all ages.’ . . .

And all the people shouted, and said, ‘Great is Truth, and mighty above all things!’”

—*The Book of Esdras.*

THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS
MEMORIAL CORPORATION

Gentlemen

I have received, through representatives of your Corporation in their New York "drive," your request for my contribution to your "task to finance and complete two Memorial structures—the Stadium and the Kansas Union—and to place upon the campus the statue of the late Dean James Woods Green."

In answer I have to say:

The men and women who gave their lives in the great war no one honors more than I. No one would more gratefully go without to have the privilege of helping to commemorate the sacrifices of our University boys and girls.

I cannot, however, give money, a certain ratio of which is to go to what is called "the Green memorial." After days of deliberation upon what your representatives lay before me, I finally recall to your minds the brazen lie as to founder set up (1910) in the building of the Law School of the University of Kansas, and tell you I can no more give to "the

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Green memorial" than I can give to a memorial to some acknowledged betrayer or filcher of a benefactor's good name. In not giving for the purpose you ask, I serve highest ethics—fidelity to truth and justice.

If you at all know my stand towards, and affection for, our Alma Mater, you, and the Alumni Association, know I am not a "tight wad"—that years ago, in "The Graduate Magazine," I urged plain and simple living in order to give to the University's needs; that I bought three life-memberships in the Association; and in other small ways I have expressed my inclinations—a little trading gift as to my book, "Life at Laurel Town: In Anglo-Saxon Kansas," has already, agreeably to our terms, netted the Alumni Association a substantial sum. In fact, for the Alumni Association I have had a sort of mother-fondness. I was the Association's first president (in the last year I held the Greek professorship); and later, here in New York, I called together (12 March, 1905) graduates and former students to form and officer the New York union. (My rule not to speak of what I do, or have done, I, with regret,

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have here to set aside to clear my position.) To the University itself, I have given gifts ranging from mummy-cloth from the tomb of the Pharaoh of the Mosaic Jews to late novels by our graduates; and, as you know, have written of the University in newspapers and books; and in songs reflecting the University's local color and original refinement.*

You are, you tell me, endeavoring to raise money for the memorial reason and sentiment would erect to more than three thousand boys and girls of our University who put their words into deeds, and went to the late war, and gave themselves, and all they were, and all they longed to be and do in, and for, the world—one hundred and twenty-eight of whom gave their lives.

And you yoke as pendant to the memorials you deem fitting, and plan, for commemoration of those brave young people, a memorial to a man who identified himself in no way

*"The University's original refinement!" you may exclaim. Yes. For instance; it is not possible that the founders and early developers of the University would have believed the cacophony of "jazz" to be music, or "The Saturday Evening Post" literature.

with sacrificial service for the country in his youth—during the war of 1861-65.

Your medley confuses calm, independent minds. The question rises, "Exactly what sort of a life are you, in the memorials you name, aiming to set up as embodiment of ideals worthy of laudation and emulation?—the life that splendidly loses self to better others?—or the life that seeks its extension by ignoble emphasis of self?" In the eighteenth-sixties, I repeat, although in the pink of health and early manhood, Mr. Green could not be counted in the Service, but among those then known as "stay-at-home-rangers"—a terser, more vigorous descriptive for the same sort of young man prevailed during the late war.

This early attitude of dependence on others for carrying the responsibilities, and performing the duties, of life, crystalized into an unbroken habit. During his last forty and more years Mr. Green lived mainly on others' energy and constructive ability—each in-law contributing some quota to his furthering. His University post he had through my Father, Judge Stephens, energizing and

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pushing to its foundation the Law School. Married to my sister, Mr. Green came to live in a house built by his wife, with her money, and successfully carried on by her inborn gift of hospitality and executive energy.* Thus the necessities, and, as happened in this case, luxuries, of roof and livelihood. He was buried in the Stephens lot at the cemetery, from the church of the Stephens family—he was born and bred in the Presbyterian communion, the branch commonly called “U. P.” His name now stands on the Stephens monument. His will devised Stephens property. There were no children; before his marriage Mr. Green said he did not believe in having children; “They are more trouble than pleasure.”

The character “the Green memorial” aims to hold up as a model I do not admire—and I have more knowledge of its elements and their synthetic workings than anybody now alive. A bidder for the applause of surface sentimentalism, a sedulous preserver of applause won, an actor even to rapid changing

*“All he was she made him,” friends of his in Lawrence have told me.

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of facial expression—as from threatening looks for one he was endeavoring to intimidate to the “Uncle Jimmy” beam worn on the campus—Mr. Green loved to attitudinize, to pose. An insistent egotism—boundless love of self—bore through his ends; by whimperings, by if-you-don’t-I-will-never-speak-to-you-agains and other bullyings, by underhand up-setting of others’ constructive work, by grabbings from dead and living Stephens. (Once a jackdaw, says a fable, would be king, so he stole from better-endowed birds.) If your wisdom tells you that envy is a motor force in an inert, non-initiative, non-constructive nature, you see an impeller of his more plainly.*

The foregoing is bare outline, and through it I submit, bringing few of many testimonies I might adduce, that the Stephens

*A woman of Lawrence, hearing he was to marry my sister, and seeing him for the first time, turned to me and said, “Do you know what that nose is for?”

“No,” I answered, laughing in youthful ignorance of her shrewd reading of character.

“You’ll find out what that nose is for,” she returned, solemnly shaking her head at me.

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family have already contributed liberally and should be excused from further service to your pendent* hero. The bearing and exterior of the gentleman—there was always about him an enveloping refinement of the early-American, Scotch-Covenanter stock—com-
plaisant when things were coming his way, an omnivorous appetite for flattery, parasitic in thought and act, what little thinking he did as to the objective world reactionary (perhaps because of mental sluggishness he loathed probing to the root of a matter)—

*“Pendent” for this reason: At the beginning of the subscriptions for the million dollar fund, all newspaper reports I saw said the University Memorial people worked for two ends, a Stadium and a Kansas-Union building. When in Kansas I asked why they had taken on a third. A graduate, hand and glove with affairs, told me the third came from a “deal” with the “James Woods Green Memorial Association,” namely: If the said Green association would help “pep up” the University Memorial people’s “drive,” in Kansas City, for one hundred and sixty thousand dollars, the said University Memorial people would, in recognition of the said Green association’s help, take over and relieve said Green association from responsibility for payment of forty thousand dollars the Green association had pledged for the “Uncle Jimmy” statue.

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through many years I never knew him to utter one original thought, or to do one original deed. "It is an immense advantage," declared a witty Frenchman, "never to have said anything."

His parasitism sought chiefly the weaker—the dead and women. Upon the efforts and abnegation of two women his career was mainly based—his able, widowed mother, who carried him through Phillips (Andover) Academy (1859-62), and Williams College (1862-66); and later my sister, her devotion and energy.*

Perhaps it was consciousness of his indebtedness to women in ancillary capacity that made him, through many years, ridicule and rail at bettering the legal condition of women.†

*Verses lately of vogue in newspapers express, in popular phrase, psychical interactions such as these—lines running somewhat like this:

"There are two sorts of people,
Just two sorts, I ween:
The people who lift,
And the people who lean."

†His eighteenth-century notions would arraign those of today, when some sudden gust over-rode his settled contempt for the subject, and he would refer to my work

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To say that he was "a man's man," "with a passion for men," (whatever abnormality that may mean) dodges the truth by phrasemongering. No one with any real knowledge of Mr. Green's tastes and habits could in

for improving women's economic and political status as "your straddle-bug ideas."

"The best women in town do not want to vote," he began one day. "Who are the best women in town?" I queried in answer, "Who is wise enough to tell who the best women are?" A silence, threatening, though, and oppressive, was the sole reply my questions had.

At the request of my sister, Mrs. Green, I lived in her house during the summer of 1908, and in the complete financial and other independence she and I agreed to when she made the proposition that I should. Mr. Green acquiesced. Seemingly, later on, he developed some regret for his agreeing, for the next year (November, 1909) he sent me a letter saying I had "disgraced our house" by carrying on propaganda for a women regent in Kansas while staying there the year before.

Such puny-spiritednesses—and those more far-reaching—through years! Their aggregation tells most plainly the calibre of the man you are heroizing. Hard to bear? Yes. Just as, in the world not of the spirit but of matter, one flea-bite may not nettle you; nor two; nor three; but an aggregation of flea-bites goads you desperately.

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conscience make that assertion. If you insist on bringing forward the question of sex, it would be exacter to say that a man's egotistical posings appeal especially to women and Mr. Green should thus be marked "a woman's man." Here we let in the smoke-screens rhetorically evolved, and just now quoted (in the first sentence of this paragraph) simply adding: The truth is that phases Mr. Green assumed appealed to types, not necessarily hysterical but rather leaning, on the one side to the primitive, on the other to the neurotic, in both sexes.

The name "Uncle Jimmy," an intimate of his told me, first fell from the lips of a grateful boy when Mr. Green, missing a part of a class, went to a police-court judge and asked him to free some student, or students, from the "cooler." Those who knew him familiarly during the next twenty-five, or so, years, know that his avocative interests lay in vamping the tradition the name bore, and touching up the halo popularly supposed to go with the sentiment of relationship expressed by strangers.

"Best man I ever knew," cried a man

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from Kansas City, when, here in New York, he learned Mr. Green was my brother-in-law.

"How did you know him?" I asked.

"Oh, I used to see him going over the campus," he answered, his eyes taking on the glint of retrospection, "and one day I spoke to him—just said, 'Good morning, Uncle Jimmy,' you know; and he said something back." A pause, and then, "Best man I ever knew."

All well enough, if you are after primitive brain-labor—which, I agree, has a beauty of its own, and a use. But flash sentimentalism is not the spiritual granite from which humanity builds institutions expressing the strength, nobility, endurance and symmetry of its soul.

"Did you," I once asked Mr. Green, thinking of the years he had, in and out of University buildings, talked "athletics," especially football. "Did you ever play a real game of ball in your life?" For a time he sat silent*—puffing at a cigar—it was on the

*You remember him always seated—muscles relaxed and his body a bit settled. He was erect only in the walking which he undertook late in life at the doctor's orders.

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porch of the Tennessee Street house—and then said he didn't believe he ever did. Almost any egocentric, in war time or in peace, is willing to let the other fellow get down into the arena and do the work, provided he sits by and, by deft manipulation, sweeps in the applause fans over on the bleachers bestow.

Mr. Green "loved" the student who would "root" for him and help make him "It." The man or woman, boy or girl, he could not count upon as his "rooter," he did not "love."

An example:—I take a boy to the University (1908) for entrance into the college—the only boy ever on the hill to whom the man nursing the "Uncle Jimmy" legend is legally, by his marriage, "uncle."

Mr. Green opposes the boy's even entering the University, tells me there are enough of the Stephens family there already; says I "have brought the boy here fixed out like a Gould"; and carps because the boy is not of football timber—a doctor in New York having forbidden him "athletics."

The boy persists and enters the college. Throughout the four years of his course the

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dean of the School of Law covertly opposes him, and when the boy's enrollment among the "laws" is broached, the dean testily answers, "He can come in. But I'll treat him just like any other nigger."

The boy, grandson of the man whose abilities pushed the School of Law to foundation and thus furnished "Uncle Jimmy" with his life-job—the boy ("Uncle Jimmy's" wife's nephew; of Anglo-Celtic blood) does not enter the Law School.

If you had borne such burdens through heavy years, would you give your money to perpetuate characterizations of the dean as "A man's man"; "A man with a passion for men"; "The embodiment of the University's spirit"; "The soul of the University?"

I hardly think you would. If you are a real man, or a real woman, with red blood and a beating heart, and detestation of the erection of aristocratic privilege in the institution of a democracy, you would tell the truth when asked to support monstrous falsities—I believe you honest enough to do that.

All in all, year in and year out, Mr. Green

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was the best actor I ever saw off the stage. A habit he had of bearing himself as if he were aggrieved, if all before him was not bending his way, thus making appeal to others' sympathies—what I have spoken of as “whimperings”; what boys call “putting up your lip”—must have taken tremendous hold upon young men with the impressionable hearts, in the experienced years and circumstances, of law students.

Thus it happened that so long as certain former students, possibly pleasuring in “legal fictions,” gathered round a table in, for example, Kansas City, and seemingly delighted in telling one another, and the local press, fanciful stories about an imaginary character, which they expressed admiration for and called “Uncle Jimmy”—through the years this went on I spoke out but once—no, twice.* When I saw, or heard of, re-

*In The “Graduate Magazine” of November, 1910; and then only after the publication of a most flagrant falsehood, which Mr. Green aided and abetted. With utmost consideration for the mistaken young men, and delicacy in phrasing their mistake, I told undeniable truth—showing how their bronze tablet published un-

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ports of such proceedings, naturally I thought of apocryphal histories; like Baron Munchausen's, for instance. Then again I wondered at the ethical sterility of the entertainers' place and times. Their conditions and pick called to my mind Byron's opening lines to his tales of "Don Juan";

"I want a hero; an uncommon want."

truth. What resulted? Little in public, so far as I know; much in private.

From what would you say inaction sprang? From moral cowardice, fear to take down the lying tablet? and by so doing confess their mistake? Or did inaction spring from stiff-necked sneers at my inability to do more than protest?

The old Socratic precept, taught years ago at the University, that the educated man is zealous for truth, that he will hasten to correct, when once you have pointed out, injustice—this teaching of our University fell through.

So it happened that in a University embodying the loftiest spirit of a democracy in its search for truth; and in a School of Law supposedly the completest expression of its democracy's eagerness for justice—in a School of Law where at least some of the men were presumably sensitive to truth and eager for justice—a wrong such as I tell of stood, and doubtless today stands, unrighted.

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But now that those men's—"my boys'"—fictions† have, denying all intellectual honesty, set up as serious statements of fact, have sought to take on the garb of truth,

My second speaking out is in my book, "Life at Laurel Town," page 178:

"WITNESS UNTO THE TRUTH"

"Thou shalt not bear false witness," spoke the God Of Israel on Horeb's barren height.

"Unto the truth bear witness," speaks the Voice Of every folk who strengthens in the Right:—

To men of Athens in vast jury courts
Judging their brother Greek by law and fact;

To Romans in their order and reports

Of the Twelve Tables and juridic act;

To Paul, the evangel, who flamed his faith

For Jew and Gentile round the Midland shore:

To Mahomet, the Arab, him who saith

"Thy justice knoweth God for evermore."

"Unto the truth bear witness," urge with awe
All codes and ethics of our School of Law.

†The following is the exactly told history of one "Uncle Jimmy" fiction, which might have grown to luxuriant proportions but for a little timely common sense and common honesty. It illustrates how natures easily, loosely, tautologically emotional, hankering after some peg on which to hang their fancies, distort

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and go so far as to intrude upon me and ask my aid for their perpetuation in a statue and inscriptions wrought by a sculptor reputed in portraiture—loyalty, and justice, and honor force me to these few plain truths. I am not one of “my boys.” Neither am I a moral coward, acquiescing in falsities

plainest happenings. In the face of staring facts disproving their fable-building, they seem merely to need a name familiar to their ears, the suggestion of a concrete figure, and lo! before your very eyes they sentimentalize and stereotype their myths:

Late one day in the spring of 1919, the postman brought me a box meticulously bound and directed. As I took it from his hand I saw, in shy letters off in one corner of the wrapper, the address of — — —.

“Not hard to tell what is in this parcel,” I said to myself.

Redbuds! There they lay, shining up from layers of damp cotton that a poet’s sensibility had prepared for their journey.

The tin box had held back the vapor which heat of the mail-bags formed, and moisture had forced the twigs into putting forth leaves of palest, most delicate green.

The buds were a vision. New York faded from my view. Instead of its brick and stone, before my eyes stood the splendors of spring in Kansas—those days

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through fear of the disfavor of those I know in Kansas. Like every real American I am a citizen abhorring the methods and results of "secret diplomacy," working for truth and justice and to be delivered from shams.

when you look towards woods and see a burning torch edging the grey of the still unleafed forest.

As daylight faded, I set the box on a stone window-ledge, hoping that Croton water, saturating the cotton, and the cool air of an April night, would quite refresh the buds.

Next morning, at the Rooms of the Kansas Welcome Association, I found a blue bowl and arranged the flowers in it, weaving through smaller twigs a vellum slip bearing nearly ten typewritten words: SENT BY — — — FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS.

The bowl I set on a table by a north window, so the buds might gain whatever cool air came in.

"How those redbuds will speak to doughboys and sailors just landed from France!" I said to myself. "When the buddies catch sight of the blossoms, they will think for a second they are actually back on some Kansas farm!"

The Association had advertised a reception for that evening, and boys would be coming from the camps neighboring New York; also from hospitals.

Several days went over before I was again at the Rooms.

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Among you, a people thinking in this matter in what is roughly called "herd thinking"—no one knowing any exact foundation for absurd assertions, except that "everybody says so," "everyone else does"—simple

As I entered, and started towards the window to see how the flowers had stood the fever and fret of a great city—as I crossed the floor, a woman, only a few weeks from Kansas, came forward, and cried;

"See what 'Uncle Jimmy' sent!"

"What did he send?" I asked, peering in the direction her hand pointed.

"Those redbuds in the bowl," answered the lady.

The vellum slip witnessing that —— had sent the buds still lay woven among the twigs.

"But this piece of paper," I said, placing a finger on the ten typewritten words, "tells that —— sent the flowers from the University of Kansas. I brought them here for the buddies to enjoy. The boys tell me that battle-scenes haunt them. I thought the redbuds, bringing vividly before their eyes Kansas woods and fields, might help to banish war-horrors.

"Mr. Green knows nothing of their being here," I added.

"Oh!" answered the lady coldly, turning away.

Thus passed one would-be myth.

Loose and emotional thought! Then loose and emotional speaking and action! So is truth crucified.

statements like this of mine may suffer attack. Stone-throwing at tellers of truth about idols (whether of clay or bronze) has not been uncommon through history. You, and others unwilling, possibly unable, to distinguish between commonplace detraction and ardor for right, and not knowing it is my habit to speak guardedly* and to understate—you and others may belittle my motives, and fall back on saying, "Pretty poor taste"; "She might have kept quiet"; "All this is the natural consequence of teaching girls to read," etc., and may quote the old Latin saying, *De mortuis nil nisi bonum*. Such possibilities I foresee. Among an emotional people the declaration of a German poet is especially apt to prove true:

"Wer die Wahrheit denkt,
Muss sein Pferd am Zügel haben;
Wer die Wahrheit schreibt,
Muss sein Fuss im Bügel haben;

*With reverence for the careful measure of our mother-tongue, this writing sustains by evidence its use of its every noun, adjective, adverb, verb and descriptive phrase.

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Wer sie aber spricht,
Muss statt Fusse Flügel haben.”*

Still, knowing all this may come, love of justice and horror of lies force me to what I here write. It is not a pleasant task to put such memories in type. It brings before me afresh the price I, and others, paid in learning what I tell. It is a duty. To clear my position, I have had to refer to realities seemingly unknown to those who hitched to a work planned to commemorate the bravery of thousands now alive (some perhaps with the pitiful lives of the gassed and shell-shocked), and of one hundred and twenty-eight boys and girls who lived bravely and died bravely, a memorial to a man throughout his long, easy, women-protected life totally and constitutionally unheroic.

Of posthumous honors “my boys” were

*“Who thinks the truth,
Must hold the bridle in his hand;
Who writes the truth,
Must ready in the stirrup stand;
Who speaks the truth,
Must have on wings to flee the land.”

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going to pay him Mr. Green repeatedly, and apparently with a sense of satisfaction, told me. But he could not have foreseen that in death, as in life, by a fatality essentially expressing his character, he was to "get there" by hanging to the strong and brave—those with the instinct of initiation, constructive activity and abounding energy; those too earnest, too engaged in the seriousness of living to attitudinize, and dramatize themselves and their deeds.

A hungerer after the plaudits of the crowd, no matter if plaudits won at the expense of honesty and loyalty! And this the result!*

*A newspaper picture of "the Green memorial" friends in Massachusetts send me while the printer is taking up this Letter.

Perhaps the statue of Mr. Green is not meant to be a portrait. Two other statues from the same sculptor's hand are familiar to me through my passing them hundreds of times: "John Harvard" (which I best remember the morning it shone with a pair of painted red stockings put on over night by lawless students), and the "Alma Mater" (commonly known as "Miss Goldstein") in front of the Library of Columbia University. Perhaps, like these two, "the Green memorial" is not meant to carry a portrait.

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Poor Jimmy!

Just now I named *duty*. My conscience, since your request makes my canvassing the question necessary—my conscience would accuse me of unfaith to a devoted soul now with God, an untiring worker for the right, a profound, penetrative thinker, one of the best of fathers, if I did not refuse your request, and tell you why I refuse. If I were silently to send you a contribution, and so endorse the character and deeds you ascribe to Mr. Green—character and deeds doubtless believed in by some of those erecting

Unless the camera distorts, the figure representing Mr. Green is not fair; nor the parts taken by themselves. For Mr. Green's the trunk lacks length, thickness, rotundity. Mr. Green never stood with legs in the relation of the statue's—the picture's—legs. His standing attitude was that of the cultivated man. His feet were arched, for a man of his size the best-shaped I ever saw (so small that when he stood, and even when he walked, he seemed a bit top-heavy) and always finely shod. Even the head, in general expression, is not Mr. Green's. I catch lines like his, but his chin he never thrust out at the angle of the statue's—the picture's.

I do not hold any brief for Mr. Green. God forbid!

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memorials to him—I should be disloyal to my Father, his work and ideals, and disloyal to members of my family at one time dependent on me, and by my contribution acknowledge as truths outstanding falsehoods.

More than fifty years now, I have watched human life passing before my eyes. In what I have seen, and what I have learned of men and women, I agree with Balzac—there are more saints than niches. But my tests as to ethics, and other fundamentals that go to make the character of a saint, seem to vary widely from yours and certain of your associates'. The life you choose over and above

But I do not like to see injustice done anyone—even a doer of injustice. Mr. Green had a more dignified, more refined presence than the statue—the picture—expresses—a mellowness which would naturally develop with the life he, fortunately for himself, fell into; a mellowness almost unctuous, like the old-time ecclesiast's, or the successful politician's, yet with less gush and more dignity than the politician's.

If Mr. Green were to see the statue of himself—as the picture represents it—I wonder what he would say! After all those years of propagation of the "Uncle Jimmy" legend, would he think of the man who prayed to be delivered from his friends?

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nobly self-sacrificing, altruistic lives lived in Kansas, and name singly, and celebrate by publishing broadcast, I can not accept for distinction.

In every service to truth and honor in, and for the University of Kansas and its people, I am,

Faithfully yours

KATE STEPHENS

New York
7 January 1922







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